

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

We respectfully request that you instruct House committee chairmen to investigate the disappearance of nearly 380 tons of powerful conventional explosives from a former Iraqi military installation.

In January 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) publicly warned about the dangers of explosives located at the Al Qaqaa facility and the need to secure the explosives. In March 2003, shortly before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, United Nations inspectors visited al Qaqaa and verified that the bunkers of explosives, mainly HMX and RDX, were intact.

Although U.S. intelligence officials were well aware of Al Qaqaa - located 30 miles south of Baghdad - the Bush Administration failed to heed these warnings and apparently did not instruct the military to search for and secure the explosives. On April 3, 2003, the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division found a white powder at Al Qaqaa that was tentatively identified as explosives but apparently no search occurred.

Ten days later, the 101st Airborne Division troops stopped overnight at Al Qaqaa but again no search was conducted. The commander of the unit that stopped at Al Qaqaa was never told that the facility was sensitive: "We happened to stumble on it. I didn't know what the place was supposed to be. We did not get involved in any of the bunkers. It was not our mission. It was not our focus. We were just stopping there on our way to Baghdad."¹

A videotape made on April 18, 2003, by a television crew with the 101st Airborne Division shows American troops breaking into a bunker at Al Qaqaa that appeared to contain IAEA seals.² Inside, the troops found crates and barrels containing what independent experts believe were HMX. The bunkers apparently were left unsecured.

When Al Qaqaa was next inspected on May 27, 2004, the explosives seen in mid-March by international inspectors were missing. An internal IAEA memorandum warned that the terrorists might be helping themselves to "the greatest explosives bonanza in

¹ *No Check of Bunker, Unite Commander Says*, New York Times (Oct. 27, 2004).

² *Video Shows G.I.'s at Weapon Cache*, New York Times (Oct. 29, 2004).

history.”

The significance of these missing explosives cannot be overstated. HMX and RDX can be used to demolish buildings, blow up airplanes, make missile warheads, and detonate nuclear weapons. The explosives also can be used in car bombing attacks against American troops fighting in Iraq.

For terrorists, even a small quantity of these explosives can be a powerful weapon. The bomb used to bring down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 contained less than one pound of these types of explosives. Larger amounts of these explosives were apparently used in the bombing of a housing complex in November 2003 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and the bombing of a Moscow apartment complex in September 1999 that killed nearly 300 people. In August 2004, Russian officials said that traces of RDX were found at the crash site of one of the two planes bombed by Chechen separatists.


The disappearance of these explosives has placed American troops, citizens, and property at great risk. It is important for Congress to determine why the Administration failed to search for and secure nearly 380 tons of powerful explosives. Among the issues that need to be investigated are:


- Why were military commanders not told about the importance of the explosives at Al Qaqaa and the need to search for and secure them?
- Was the failure to search for and secure Al Qaqaa the result of an inadequate number of American troops in Iraq?
- Why was the military told to proceed to Baghdad without first securing ammunition stops along the way?
- Have these explosives been used against U.S. soldiers in Iraq or in recent terrorist attacks?
- When did Administration officials learn about the disappearance of these explosives and what did they do?


We would appreciate your notifying us as to whether you will instruct committee chairmen to investigate this very serious matter.


Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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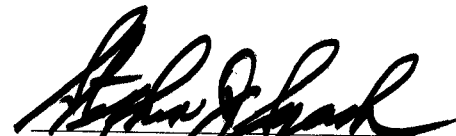

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